



On January 18th, 2023, the Raise the Roof Coalition co-sponsored a webinar on the eviction crisis in Contra Costa County and solutions from neighboring communities (webinar [recording](#) and [slides](#)). The event highlighted the findings and recommendations of a recent [report](#) on the challenges facing unrepresented tenants in Contra Costa's eviction courts. This Q&A document provides responses to the audience questions that weren't covered during the webinar. Please email [Rachita Rawal](#), Communications Manager at East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE), if you have any other questions or want to get involved.

Are court eviction data provided city-by-city in Contra Costa County?

The Contra Costa Superior Court does not publish any data on eviction cases, whether for cities or the county as a whole. The only data that it regularly produces is a once-annual report to the California Judicial Council regarding the number of eviction filings in a given year and how these cases were resolved. (The most recent report from the Judicial Council, which includes data for Contra Costa, can be accessed [here](#).) Unfortunately, these data do not consider disparities in eviction trends across cities or demographic groups, nor are they published on a regular and timely basis. Policymakers and members of the public need these sorts of regular and granular data to determine how many evictions are occurring, who they're impacting, and the extent to which the process is fair to all parties. This is why the Eviction Court Watch report recommends that Contra Costa County and the Superior Court [release eviction data](#) in a regular, recurring, and transparent manner. Otherwise, the only way to receive data on eviction filings or physical removals in Contra Costa is to submit a public record request to the Court or the Office of the Sheriff. The Court, however, has proven unresponsive to data requests from community based organizations. As Hugo Ramírez mentioned during the webinar, one of the added benefits of a tenant right to counsel program is that it generates data on eviction trends and outcomes.

Do we know how many evictions took place after the eviction moratorium expired?

Unfortunately, the lack of routine reporting on the part of the Court and the Sheriff makes it difficult to know how many evictions have occurred since the end of the eviction moratorium. The most recent data reported by the *Mercury News* showed that [eviction filings shot up](#) from around 160 in March 2022, the last month that the general moratorium was in effect, to 358 in July 2022, when all remaining protections for rent relief applicants were repealed. This was the highest rate of eviction filings in the Bay Area. However, this only represents a fraction of likely evictions. It's estimated that, for every legal eviction process, [two to five evictions](#) occur outside of the courts, when landlords use extra-legal means, such as verbal threats and housing service disruptions, to push tenants to "self-evict." The tendency to self-evict is exacerbated by a lack of legal services, since many tenants either don't understand their rights or assume that, without a lawyer, they'll lose in court.

What analysis has been done to determine the harm to the public health and economy in Contra Costa County which has come from the high eviction rates during the deadly and dangerous COVID pandemic?

It does not appear as though the public health impacts of eviction during the pandemic have been studied in Contra Costa. However, there is [extensive research](#) on the negative impacts of eviction on adult and child health outcomes and racial, gender, and economic health disparities in the U.S. According to the data, eviction is clearly linked to: (a) increased rates of COVID-19 infection and mortality; (b) negative birth outcomes, including prematurity, low birth weight, and infant mortality; and (c) increased rates of anxiety, depression, suicide, and drug- and alcohol-related mortality. These health outcomes have a negative impact on economic security at the individual, family, and community levels. Researchers have found that [eviction disrupts education, employment, and social networks](#), which are critical to economic opportunity and resilience. At the same time, it dislocates workers, increases commute times, and exacerbates health problems that undermine economic productivity. In turn, by increasing negative social outcomes and homelessness, it drains the fiscal resources of local governments.

What are the statistics for seniors age 55-60+? I'm dealing with many seniors who are being priced out of their living situations in Contra Costa County.

Seniors and people on fixed incomes are among those most at risk of eviction and homelessness due to increasing rents. Nationally, an [estimated 33% to 50%](#) of unhoused people are over 50.

Of the 56 cases that were observed from May to mid-October 2022 during the Eviction Court Watch program in Contra Costa County, an estimated 18% of tenants were over the age of 65. This means that seniors, who make up 16% of local renter households, were somewhat over-represented among tenants facing eviction. The report documents a number of reasons that [seniors were especially vulnerable to eviction](#)—including illnesses, disabilities, and challenges using technology that made it difficult to appear in court, apply for rent relief, or access other tenant resources. Given these vulnerabilities, the fact that even more seniors weren't subject to eviction may reflect the fact that one of the county's four tenant legal service providers, Contra Costa Senior Legal Services, is dedicated to assisting residents 60 and older with legal matters, including eviction cases. Seniors at risk of eviction should call CCSLS at 925-609-7900 for help.

How many cases are the roughly four attorneys who can represent families in Central and East County able to assist in any given month or year?

The legal service organizations Bay Area Legal Aid and Centro Legal de la Raza estimate, with the support of supervising attorneys and paralegals, each staff attorney is able to assist around 150 clients per year through a spectrum of services, ranging from brief-scope consults to full-scope representation. Given that 3,500 rent relief applicants from Contra Costa requested help from a legal service provider through Housing Is Key, as discussed during the webinar, it's clear that the County does not fund enough tenant attorneys to meet even this fraction of the existing need.

It seems based on the data that the African American community is disproportionately impacted by eviction. What resources are available to organizations to do outreach and connect those in the African American community to resources?

During the pandemic, Contra Costa County partnered with the Raise the Roof Coalition and Richmond Community Foundation to provide grants to small organizations, including faith-based organizations, that were rooted in the communities most at risk of eviction to conduct targeted outreach and assistance to renters interested in applying for COVID-related rent relief through the Housing Is Key program. This approach was very successful in increasing awareness and relief among Black residents. Indeed, the data show that [37% of rental assistance applicants](#) in Contra Costa identified as Black or African American, even though Black households make up only 16% of renter households in the area. In other words, targeted outreach meant that Black residents were over-represented among Housing Is Key applicants.

While the rent relief and community outreach programs have ended, the County can and should continue to invest in this proven model of targeted outreach alongside improved resources for tenants. The County is currently [seeking grant proposals](#) for homelessness prevention services in the most impacted communities. This could include outreach to African American renters at risk of eviction to connect them to tenant legal services and other assistance. The County is accepting applications until 5pm on March 3rd, 2023. The Measure X Housing Fund, as it's called, will be an annual grantmaking program for the next 20 years.

Are there any organizations or agencies that aid homeowners evicted in Contra Costa County by lenders creating fraudulent documents? This type of eviction is creating homelessness as well.

While Contra Costa's tenant legal service providers may be able to provide limited assistance to homeowners facing eviction, issues regarding homeownership and foreclosure, including fraud, are best handled by Housing and Economic Rights Advocates. If you're a homeowner and are concerned about mortgage fraud, eviction, or foreclosure, you can call HERA at 510-271-8443. If you're a homeowner and are having trouble paying or meeting the terms of your mortgage, you can [search](#) for a federally designated mortgage counselor in your city or zip code.

I'm curious why a landlord would not accept rent money from a church on the tenant's behalf. What is the landlord's motivation to deny that?

When tenants can't pay their rent in full, many landlords move to evict them right away, rather than seek a compromise or alternative source of payment that would allow the tenants to stay housed. The tendency to treat eviction as a first, rather than final, recourse is especially strong in areas where rents are increasing. As market rents rise, this increases the gap between what low-income tenants can pay and what landlords could charge a new tenant. This gap creates an incentive for landlords to remove the current tenant and rent the unit to a higher-paying one. In these cases, landlords may pursue eviction even if the tenants come up with a way to pay their debt, like rental assistance, because the financial benefits of replacing the current tenants are greater than receiving the back-due rent. Tenant protection policies, such as rent stabilization, are designed to address these common problems by preventing excessive rent increases that accelerate displacement in low-income communities.

Is the mediation process uniform across the counties in Northern California or different for each county?

The mediation process varies widely across counties. Both Alameda and San Francisco Counties require a mandatory settlement conference (MSC) for all eviction cases that are going to a trial. In both cases, tenants are offered free legal representation. (In Alameda County, these services are limited to low-income tenants, while in San Francisco, they're made available to all tenants.) In San Francisco, the process is officiated by a judicial officer, usually a judge pro tem or visiting judge. These protocols ensure that settlement negotiations are conducted under the oversight of an officer of the court with more equal representation among the parties. By contrast, the mediation program in Contra Costa, which is optional, is conducted by trained volunteers. This comparison to neighboring counties makes clear that, while mediation may provide a valuable site for compromise in eviction cases, Contra Costa tenants would experience more equitable outcomes if the County were to ensure that tenants were represented as often as landlords. Without a tenant right to counsel, however, the Eviction Court Watch program found that landlords are represented [12 times often](#) as tenants in Contra Costa.

What efforts have been made to integrate social workers, navigators, and case managers into the eviction prevention systems in Alameda and San Francisco Counties?

For low-income tenants at risk of eviction, housing insecurity is often intimately linked to other personal, financial, and health crises. As documented in the Eviction Court Watch report, these stressors can make it even [more challenging](#) for tenants to navigate the complexities of the legal eviction process in ways that lead to displacement, regardless of the merits of the case. As such, social workers, navigators, and case managers can provide a crucial connection between tenants and service providers that make eviction prevention efforts even more effective. San Francisco's tenant right to counsel program, for instance, provides funding to legal aid organizations to offer wraparound services to tenants facing eviction. This allows the Eviction Defense Collaborative to staff a team of social workers who work hand-in-hand with attorneys to ensure that their clients receive holistic support to address their needs.

Are text messages appropriate for interactions with landlords when tenants are concerned that they may need documentation in eviction proceedings? Or is it best to communicate through work orders and emails?

Text messages and emails are an appropriate way for tenants who are worried about eviction to communicate with their landlords. As long as digital text communications between identifiable parties can be printed out, then those messages will be treated as legitimate evidence in court. Whenever a tenant/landlord interaction occurs in person or over the phone, tenants should follow up in writing to ensure that the conversation has been documented.

How do you recommend expanding housing to alleviate the housing crisis alongside anti-displacement measures?

More housing is needed for all income groups—especially those with the lowest incomes and highest rent burdens—in order to address California’s housing crisis. However, without policies that protect renters from unaffordable rent increases, evictions, and landlord harassment, new middle- and upper-income housing in low-income communities exacerbates the displacement of long-time residents. Therefore, strong tenant protections are needed to stabilize community members before new market-rate or mixed-income housing is developed. Otherwise, this new development won’t solve the housing crisis. Instead, it will push housing-insecure households into other under-resourced areas and/or increase homelessness.

Further, it’s more cost-effective, in both human and fiscal terms, to prevent displacement and homelessness before they occur, rather than build a new temporary or permanent housing unit for a family once they’ve pushed into housing insecurity. In L.A. County, the analytics firm Stout found that investing in a tenant right to counsel program would create a [380% return on investment](#). For every \$1.00 spent, the County would save \$4.80 in homeless services. Along those lines, AllHome—an organization that advocates for solutions to homelessness across the Bay Area—recommends that jurisdictions invest [\\$4.00 in homelessness prevention measures](#), such as tenant legal services and rental assistance, for every \$1.00 spent on interim shelter and \$2.00 spent on permanent supportive housing. The Contra Costa Board of Supervisors formally adopted AllHome’s Regional Action Plan in 2021, becoming the first county government to do so. However, Contra Costa is yet to take clear and meaningful steps to balance investments in a way that aligns with this prevention-centered strategy.

Are there cases of tenants' unions and neighborhood associations (inclusive of renters) advocating for both expanded housing and essential infrastructure in underserved areas?

Yes. In most cases, neighborhood associations consist primarily of property owners, and thus advocate for policies that restrict the residence of renters in general and low-income people in particular. However, there are some examples of renters and homeowners working together to advance more equitable patterns of housing and infrastructure development. In Berkeley, for instance, the [Friends of Adeline](#) neighborhood group—which is made up of both renters and owners—has fought for deeply affordable housing development at the Ashby BART Station in South Berkeley, including a “right to return” policy that would prioritize families displaced from this historically Black community for new affordable homes.